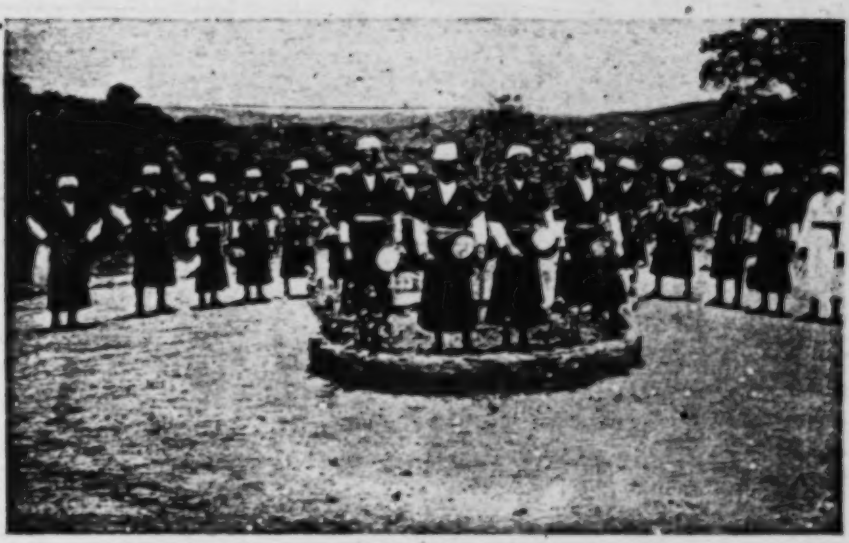
1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

535



DANCERS ABOUT TO BEGIN DANCING

ANOTHER DANCE

[Facing p. 96]

I:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

several temples: one dedicated to Bhagavati, another to Mahādēva, two to Ayyappa, and six to Raktēshwari (identified with Chaṁuṇḍi). The temples dedicated to Bhagavati, Mahādēva, and Ayyappa have Brahmin priests who worship the deities by using Sanskrit *mantras*, whereas those dedicated to Raktēshwari do not have Brahmin priests, and pigs are sacrificed annually to her. There are two modes of worship, the Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic, and in the festival of a village-deity these two modes are found mixed in varying proportions.

Usually there is more than one temple in a village, and a temple contains more than one deity. The temples in a village might be either Sanskritic or non-Sanskritic, or might represent varying degrees of compromise between the two elements. Finally, a village-deity might also be the deity of more than one village.

The festival of a village-deity requires a certain amount of co-operation between the various temples in a village, and not infrequently between villages. For instance, the festivals of the various deities in a village are so arranged that they do not clash if not actually dovetail. The festivals of the deities Kētrappa and Chaunḍi in Bēngūr occur at the same time, but they dovetail remarkably considering the elaborateness of the ritual that is performed. A kind of offering known as *térémuḍi* (usually a man wearing *téré* equipment) is sent by both the Bhagavati (in common parlance, Povvedi) and Chaunḍi temples to the Kētrappa temple on the eighteenth day (which is also called the *nammé* or 'festival day') of the biennial Kētrappa festival.

A few miles from Bēngūr is Balmāvṭi, which has an important temple dedicated to Bhagavati (Povvedi). This deity also has a very elaborate biennial festival, similar to Kētrappa's, but the interesting point is that the two festivals are performed in alternate years. When the 'big festival' of Kētrappa is being performed, Bhagavati of Balmāvṭi has a 'small festival', and vice versa. That is to say, this arrangement implies some co-operation between Begunāḍ and Ballatnāḍ. This is all the more surprising as formerly there was a feud (*maradalé*) between these two *nāḍs*, and this feud seems to have been a long and bitter one.

There is another type of co-operation to which reference must be made here. The Baṇṇas and Maléyas who officiate as oracles and dancers (wearing *téré*) at the festival of Kētrappa come from the villages Saṇṇa Pulikōṭu and Balmāvti respectively. The services of

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

Baṇṇas and Maléyas are in demand in surrounding villages, but they manage to fulfil all their ritual engagements. Similarly, Paṇikas from the village Biḷigunda officiate at the festival of Kundat Bhadrakāḷi. These Paṇikas too are very busy people, serving as they do a number of villages. But the people of Kuklūr have ensured their services by giving them, in the past, an advance (*iḍu*) of Rs50 and two gold bangles. This is paid in addition to the customary fees paid after every festival. The payment of the advance guarantees the Paṇika's attendance and service at the festival. It is clear that the Paṇika or Baṇṇa or Maléya can only fulfil his engagements if the festivals do not clash with each other. The Baṇṇa is essential at the festival of a village-deity, and it is perhaps his list of engagements which ensures co-operation between the villages he serves.

The saying 'kētrappang pātradoḍané', meaning 'the entire pot of toddy for Kētrappa', testifies to the deity Kētrappa's great liking for toddy. Part of the ritual of the festival of Kētrappa consists in fetching toddy from the Kopaṭṭi hills, about seven miles from Bēngūr. The Kuḍiyas (a tribe) in the Kopaṭṭi hills tap the toddy, and the festival-priests go to the Kopaṭṭi hills on the seventh day of the festival carrying new earthen pots (*kaléyas*) filled with paddy, which is the perquisite of the Kuḍiyas. These pots are brought back on the sixteenth day, and toddy is offered to Kētrappa and other deities in Bēngūr on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth days. The Kuḍiyas visit the Kētrappa temple on the eighteenth day to offer their homage to the deity, watch the ritual, and receive a share of meat and toddy.

Every priestly (*kāvukāra*) *okka* in Bēngūr sends at least one representative to the Kopaṭṭi hills on the seventh day. They all leave the village at about 4 a.m., after taking a bath in cold water and donning ritually pure robes. They are in a condition of purity and other villagers may not look at them till they have crossed the boundary of the village. Both when they go to deposit the pots and to bring back the pots full with toddy some esoteric ritual takes place in the Kopaṭṭi hills. The festival-priests are very secretive about it, but I learn that all the ritual centres round the possession of a Kuḍiya oracle by Ayyappa, a deity of the Kuḍiyas in the Kopaṭṭi hills.

The festival necessarily implies co-operation between Bēngūr people and a hill tribe living in inaccessible hills covered with

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

796 the immense fire that is burning several yards from the Bhadrakāḷi *téré*. The chicken and a little toddy are offered to the *téré* representing Bhadrakāḷi.

• [535] The Paṇika dancer gets ready for his performance which begins an hour later. He wears tiny bells (*gaggaras*) round his ankles, paints his face red and yellow, wears a turban, and ties an elaborate red skirt round his waist. He stands there waiting for the Bhadrakāḷi oracle to arrive and give him permission to place the circular *téré* on his head. The *téré* is kept flat on the head and held by one hand while the Paṇika dances and sings a song in praise of Bhadrakāḷi.

796 787 Three Poleyas, oracles of deities worshipped only by Poleyas, also wait for the Bhadrakāḷi oracle to arrive. The latter rushes into the Nandiyaṇḍa threshing-yard, stamps on the roaring fire with bare feet, and then touches the Bhadrakāḷi *téré*, signifying that the Paṇika may now place it on his head. He then rushes to the temple, where he starts dancing a very vigorous dance before the shrine of Bhadrakāḷi.

A change is noticeable in the Poleya oracles as soon as the Bhadrakāḷi oracle rushes in. The deities of the Poleyas are regarded as subservient to, and dependent upon, Bhadrakāḷi, who is the deity of the higher castes. And the oracles, who are Poleyas of the deities of the Poleyas, are also regarded as inferior to, dependent upon, the oracle of Bhadrakāḷi, who is a Coorg. Thus the structural distance between Coorgs and Poleyas expresses itself in every sphere.

Two Poleya oracles run to and fro, with swords in their hands, while the third, the oracle of the deity Pūda, writhes on the ground and groans, while the Bhadrakāḷi oracle is stamping on the fire with bare feet. He stops groaning and writhing as soon as the Bhadrakāḷi oracle leaves the threshing-yard.

The villagers place the *téré* on the Paṇika's head. The latter starts singing a song in Maylayāḷam in honour of Bhadrakāḷi. The entire body of villagers, headed by the Poleya oracles marching with their faces to the crowd, then run to the temple. The Poleyas stop outside the temple while the others go in. The votive sheep also may not go in, and they remain outside the temple. They are later sacrificed outside the temple.

The villagers go into the temple and walk round the shrine thrice. The village goat heads the procession inside the temple.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

misdemeanour during the festival. Again, the latter may be regarded as more secular than the former: at the festivals of the village-deities the members of the village take a vow in the name of god to keep the rules and restrictions, whereas at the harvest festival no such vow is taken.

At the end of the harvest festival there is a village dance (*ūr kōlu*) in which all the adult males in the village have to take part; and on the following day, or two days later, there is a dance for the entire *nāḍ* to which every village belonging to the particular *nāḍ* sends its representatives. Each village makes a special point of sending its best dancers to the *nāḍ* dance.

The village dance is followed by a collective hunt by the villagers. (A collective hunt may also be organized by a *nāḍ*.) Every adult male in the village is required to be present at the hunt, and a successful hunt implies a co-ordination of the activities of numerous individuals. Lack of proper co-ordination has to be paid for with life or limb.

The festivals of village-deities, the harvest festival, and the festival of arms all terminate with a dinner for the entire village (or *nāḍ*). The boar that is killed in the collective hunt is cooked on this occasion. If the game is not enough to go round, then one or two domesticated pigs or goats are slaughtered in addition. Each house brings its own cooked rice-flour to the dinner. The headman selects five men to serve food to the men.

The men bring halves of coconut shells or leaf-cups for liquor: a young man is given only one cup of liquor while an elder is entitled to more. The singers get an extra share of meat and liquor. The Poleyas do not sit with the rest, but are given a quantity of meat and liquor which they consume by themselves.

Both the village dance and the village hunt stress the unity of the village. In the case of the village hunt, there is the additional element of the threat of danger from the boar or tiger or other wild animal. The village dinner is rightly called *ūrormé* or 'village harmony', as it maintains and increases the harmony of the village.

IX

Like the village and *okka*, the *nāḍ* is a real social unit and not a mere administrative division imposed from above by the Rājas. In fact, before the political integration of Coorg by the Rājas, the maximum political unit seems to have been a union of two or three

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

their minds with leadership and precedence. In their folksongs, not only a group of men, but also a herd of cattle and a bunch of flowers have their leaders. And there the usual epithet by which a headman is referred to is *mūpayanda*, which means 'having precedence'. The sense of precedence is ubiquitous: formerly, when caravans from every *nāḍ* went to Malabar every summer, the senior headman's pack-bullocks marched ahead of the pack-bullocks of the others.

Ideas about precedence are expressed on ritual occasions. For instance, most festivals of Coorgs include the sport of shooting at a target (*kuri*): a coconut and, on either side of it, a plantain spathe are tied to the high branch of a tree, and the competitors have to shoot at the coconut from a distance. The headman of the village has the right to shoot first at the target. Again, at the village dance held during the harvest festival, the village-headman, or an expert dancer selected by him, leads the dance. The temple-headman comes next after the village-headman.

At the *nāḍ* dance, which is held a day or two after the village dance, precedence is very important. The dancers of each village forming part of the *nāḍ* gather together at their headman's house, whence they proceed to the *nāḍ* green with band. When the senior *nāḍ*-headman arrives with his men everyone present has to stand up. A mat is spread for him, and others may sit down only after him. If *nāḍ*-headmen from other *nāḍs* come to the dance, they sit to the left of the host *nāḍ*-headman, observing a strict order of seniority between them. Every dancer is provided with a pair of sticks. The host *nāḍ*-headman leads the dance, with the guest *nāḍ*-headmen occupying positions immediately next to him. The temple-headman comes after the guest *nāḍ*-headmen, and the various village-headmen who are gathered there take up positions after the temple-headman.

The guests are received with band when they arrive, and after the dancing and sports are over, they are given refreshments which nowadays consist of coffee, soft drinks, fruits, and betel leaves and areca-nut. Each guest *nāḍ*-headman pays a *paṇa* to the hosts before leaving. The hosts accompany each guest a little distance, the host's band proceeding ahead of the party. When all the guests have left, the villagers conduct their own *nāḍ*-headman in state to his house. They dine in his house, after which they disperse.

Festivals: (1) Huttari

243 746 627 The Huttari is the feast of first fruits. The name is said to be derived from the Malayalam 'pudiyari', or new rice. It occurs at full moon at the end of November or beginning of December. After various preliminary ceremonies, the person chosen to cut the first sheaves goes at sunset to the fields in procession with a lighted torch in a dish of rice [415] carried before him. He has a sickle in one hand and a bamboo bottle of fresh milk in the other. He cuts the sheaf and distributes the stalk to those present, and puts some into the milk. This is carried in procession to the [534] house, the people shouting, "Poli, poli, Deva", that is, "Increase, increase, O God," followed by a blast of the shrill Coorg brass horn. It is truly a national and thanksgiving feast entirely uninfluenced by Brahmanism. It [535] lasts for seven days. It begins with village rejoicings and extends to Nad [533] or district gatherings, and ends every day with the peculiar cane dance of [526] the men and boys to the tune of the most melancholy and monotonous sound of horns, drums and songs. Other games vary the proceedings, but the most interesting part is always the champion fight in playful dance, which often ends in a general skirmish in which the canes are freely used.

(2) Kaylmurtha

527 The Kaylmurtha is the festival of arms celebrated by the youths and men of Coorg sometime in August. When the hard labours of ploughing, sowing, and transplanting of rice are over, a break in the monsoon spreads its bright light and sunny warmth over the hills and [727] dales, forests and fields in Coorg, when a holiday is most welcome. The Takka of the grama calls some respectable men to accompany him to the astrologer's home. They ascertain the most propitious day for the celebration of the festival.

[410] On the morning of the joyous day, the whole armoury of the house is placed in the verandah, gun and spear, bow and arrow, sword and knife. Some of the young men sit down to burnish the familiar weapons. When this is done, they are carried to a room or central hall, where they are [782] placed in a corner. When the auspicious moment arrives incense is burnt before the weapons, sandal paste is dotted on them in profusion, and a show offering, *Nivedya*, is offered to them and the idols. As soon as the [526] festival is over, the whole house sits down to dinner. The men then proceed with their arms to the village green, *uru-mandu*, to spend the afternoon in shooting at a mark and in athletic sports. The following day is devoted to a hunt in the forest belonging to the village. This is followed by a great hunt of the whole Nadu. It is a repetition of the village hunt on a larger scale. Whatever game is obtained, the man who killed the [533] animal receives a hind quarter and the head. The rest goes to the company. The Kaylmurtha is the most glorious of all festivities to the young Coorgs,

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

one, who must hold this rope. A piece of wood, generally of a creeper called Odi, is cut into seven parts, which are called Chandu, i. e. balls. The man holding the rope puts six of these balls in a circle round the peg at a distance of the rope's length, the seventh is deposited close by the peg. The whole company now endeavours to pick off the balls without being touched by their guardian. The player in the centre, always keeping the rope's end in one hand, turns round and round, and tries to touch some one of the aggressors. If he succeed, the person touched must take his place and the play recommences. When six balls are abstracted, the seventh must be moved to the distance of one foot from the peg. When this also is lost, the man has to run through the whole crowd and escape, without being caught, to the Musicians' place. If he reach this asylum in safety, the play is won and finished. If he be caught on his way, he is brought before the Nettle-man, an officer of the play-court, who has been waiting all the time, a long Angare-stick—a large fierce nettle—in his hand, for the victim. His hands and feet are well touched and the play ends. Now the assembly perform different kinds of plays and dances, representing the wars which in ancient times appear to have been waged between people of different districts. A man is wounded; a physician is called, who prescribes for him. Another wounded man dies, and Holeyas are called to invite his friends to the funeral. A scene of demoniacal possession is acted. The funeral is performed. Now stories are told of incredibilities. "I saw the other day a little hare attacking a tiger and breaking its neck." Reply: "Did you? I saw a buffaloe flying over the mountains," etc. Three men invoke again Ayappa, Mahádéva and Bhagavati. Dances follow, accompanied by the beating of sticks keeping time with the music of the band outside. Feats of gymnastic strength and agility follow, and another invocation of the three deities concludes the performance.

796 526 [824] 796 536 796 [538] [782] [535] [526] [782]

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

796 when they have arrived at the place of meeting, they sit down in
[535] groups with the children, and look at the dances performed by the men, who go through the evolutions of Coorg saltation, beating small rattans, of which they carry one in each hand, while they move to the time of a music, which proceeds from a group of Holeyas, stationed between the assembly of the Coorgs and that of their own people, who enjoy themselves, in the same fashion as their masters, at a little distance.

[536] Theatrical performances are added. Brahmans, Moplas, Voddas (tank diggers from Orissa), Gadikas (snake dancers), Jógis (represented by little boys), play through the village.

796 After dinner, on the ninth day, the Nádukólu begins.
526 This is an assembly of the whole district. Every thing is
[634] done as at the Urukólu, only on a larger scale. At these
[535] assemblies, while the monotonous music plays and the large circle of dancers moves in the measured stick-dance, a couple of men from different grámas and armed with a small shield and a long rattan, step from opposite sides into the ring with a shout of defiance and keeping time with the music, they approach and evade each other, swinging their rattans and dealing blows, aimed at the legs and with their shield warding them off, but often the players get so excited, that their single stick sham combat ends in a mutual severe flogging,
796 which has to be stopped by the spectators. At five the parties from the different villages separate and go home.

[535] In the afternoon of the tenth day, the Dévarakólu (stick-
[574] dance in honor of Bhagavati) takes place in every village. The entertainment is the same as on the two preceding days. Dinners are held at different houses of appointment, and terminate on the 11th day with a large public dinner that is given, on some open plain in the forest when the musicians, bards, drummers, Holeyas and Médas unite their exertions to give eclat to the festivity.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

open space before the temple, many of them possessed by devils of their own, which belong to the host of Pannangalamma, all of them jumping and dancing and beating their drums and gongs in the most approved fashion. Every one of them, man, woman and child, carries a long dry bamboo-stick. These bamboos are piled up in front of the temple, like soldiers' muskets, and set fire to at night, when the Holeyas dance round the flames until the pile breaks and falls to the ground. (If the pile fall towards the east, it is considered a lucky omen.) While these things take place outside, the temple-yard resounds with the voices of Coorgs, singing hymns in honor of Bhagavati, and the wild notes of many drums, through which the shrill words of the demoniac Coorg now and then pierce—a dismal scene!

On the seventh day, after the morning circumambulation of the temple, votive offerings are brought by the villagers of the parish. In each village the people collect at the house of some one, who has vowed a bullock-load of rice or cocoanuts, and take their breakfast. After breakfast, the whole company proceeds with the offering to the temple, singing and making music. The gift having been presented to the priest, the party returns to the village, to carry another contribution to the temple in the same manner. Thus the forenoon is spent. Then the young men dance for some hours. Music heightens the joy of the entertainments, and all the rest of the community, women, girls, children and old men, sit round the temple-yard—admiring spectators. At four o'clock the idol is taken out and carried round the shrine, the whole assembly joining in the procession. The Brahman-carrier of Bhagavati is possessed by the goddess. He stretches out his hand during the strange dance, which he performs with the idol upon his head. Whoever can, puts some money into his open hand. He, conscious enough in this respect, casts every

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

796 piece given to him into a copper vessel, held by the Tantri.
[782] With the setting sun the business of the day is concluded.

The morning of the eighth day is devoted to the delivery of votive presents, as on the preceding day. At ten o'clock
● [535] dances are performed by the young men, as on the seventh day. This continues till two o'clock, when all the good shots
796 assemble for shooting at a mark. A cocoanut is hung up in
526 some tree between two plantain-bunch-tops as a mark. He who hits the nut, is rewarded with a present of three annas and the honor of the name of a good marksman. Then one of the Takkas, or the Coorg-dancer before Bhagavati, distributes a number of cocoanuts (of which there is an abundance, as every family must bring one or two) to the young men. One seizes a nut between his hands, others try to take it out of his grasp. In a few moments the whole ground is filled
796 with parties struggling for cocoanuts. He who succeeds in forcing the nut out of the hands of the original possessor,
[788] carries it away as his prize. At three o'clock the idol-procession takes place again, after which all the men go with the idol to the river or the tank, to bathe the goddess and themselves.

Ninth day. From each house one person appears at the temple, bearing the yearly money-contribution, which is deli-
[794] vered to the Takkas. The collection being made, the salaries of the temple-officers and servants of the temple are paid.
[574] Then the Brahmans give a good, undefiled dinner of pure vegetable dishes, to their Coorg supporters, first, of course, eating themselves, and leaving the rest to their friends. This temple dinner is the last act in the Bhagavati festival.

527 **d. The Keilmûrta festival.**

The Keilmûrta festival is a very different affair, altogether
[787] a Coorg business. Early in the month of Leo (July—August) the Takka of the gráma calls some respectable men to

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

when the turn came to a certain house, the devoted victim made his escape into the jungle. The villagers, after an unsuccessful search, returned to the temple and said to the pújári: "Kalak-ádu" which has a double meaning viz. "Kalake," next year—"ádu," we will give, or "ádu", a goat: and thenceforth only scape-goats were offered. The devotees fast during the day. The he-goat is killed in the afternoon, the blood sprinkled upon a stone, and the flesh eaten. At night the Panikas dressed in red and white striped cotton cloths and their faces covered with metal or bark masks perform their demoniacal dances.

In Mercara-táluq in Ippanivolavádi and in Kádakéri in Hálerinád the villagers sacrifice a kóna or male-buffalo instead of a man. Tied to a tree in a gloomy grove near the temple, the beast is killed by a Méda who cuts off its head with a large knife, but no Coorgs are present at the time. The blood is spilled on a stone under a tree and the flesh eaten by the Médas.

In connection with this sacrifice there are peculiar dances performed by the Coorgs around the temple: the *Kombáta* or *horn-dance*, each man wearing the horns of a spotted deer or stag on his head; the *Piliáta* or *peacocks'-feather-dance*, the performers being ornamented with peacocks' feathers, and the *Chauriáta* or *yák-tail-dance*, during which the dancers, keeping time, swing yák tails. These ornaments belong to the temple, where they are kept.

In some cases where a particular curse is said by the Kanya to rest upon a house, stable or field, which can only be removed by an extraordinary sacrifice, the ceremony performed seems to be another relic of human sacrifices. The Kanya sends for some of his fraternity, the Panikas or Bannas, and they set to work. A pit is dug in the middle room of the house, or in the yard, or the stable, or the field, as the occasion may require. Into this one of the magicians des-

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India

COORG AW5

has been sacrificed. Similarly in Bellur in Tavaligeri-Murnad of Kiggatnad taluq, once a year, by turns from each house, a man was sacrificed by cutting off his head at the temple; but when the turn came to a certain home, the devoted victim made his escape into the jungle. The villagers, after an unsuccessful search, returned to the temple, and said to the pūjārī 'Kalak Adu,' which has a double meaning, *viz.* Kalak, next year, Adu, we will give, or Adu, a goat, and thenceforth only scapegoats were offered. The devotees fast during the day. The he-goat is killed in the afternoon; the blood is sprinkled upon a stone, and the flesh eaten. At night the Panikas, dressed in red and white striped cotton cloths, and their faces covered with metal or bark masks, perform their demoniacal dances. In Mercara taluq in Ippanivolavade, and in Kadikeri in Halerinad, the villagers sacrifice a Kona or male buffalo instead of a man. Tied to a tree in a gloomy grove near the temple, the beast is killed by a Mēda (a wandering tribe, who are basket and mat makers), who cuts off its head with a large knife, but no Coorgs are present at the time. The blood is spilled on a stone under a tree, and the flesh eaten by the Mēdas. In connexion with this sacrifice there are peculiar dances performed by the Coorgs around the temple, the *kombata* or horn dance, each man wearing the horns of a spotted deer or stag on his head; the *pili-ata* or peacock's feather dance, the performers being ornamented with peacock's feathers, and the *chauri-ata* or yak-tail dance, during which the dancers, keeping time, swing yak-tails. These ornaments belong to the temple, where they are kept.

"In some cases where a particular curse, which can only be removed by an extraordinary sacrifice, is said by the Kaniya[1] to rest upon a house, stable, or field, the ceremony performed seems to be another relic of human sacrifices. The Kaniya sends for some

[1] The Kaniyas are religious mendicants, said to be descendants of a Malayali Brāhman and a low-caste woman.